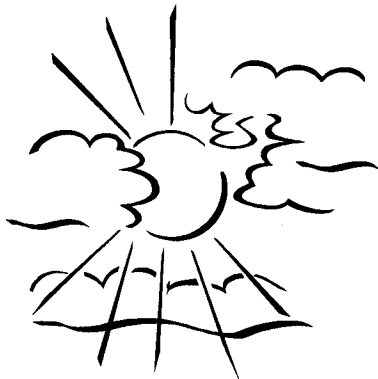


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Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, April 24, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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WAYNE COUNTY

Child protection is goal of center

Hospital program focuses on abuse

April 24, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The suite of rooms is cramped and not much to look at, but the idea behind the Children's Hospital of Michigan's new Child Protection Center is first rate. It specializes in the diagnosis of child maltreatment and opened in its own office in December with little fanfare. The center's medical director, Dr. Vincent Palusci, however, has been seeing children who have been abused or neglected at the hospital since he was hired by Detroit-based Children's Hospital in August. Today, the center is raising its profile by throwing an invitation-only open house to showcase the work of its staff.

"We're shooting for 300 kids a year in this space, which is kind of small," said Palusci, 47. "When you look at the numbers of kids in the child protection system in Wayne County we could easily double and triple that."

In Wayne County, Child Protective Services receives about 17,000 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect each year and finds evidence of maltreatment in about 3,500 cases a year.

The Child Protection Center, which is housed in an office building a few blocks north of Children's Hospital, is teamed with Wayne County's Kids Talk, a nonprofit agency. Child advocates and law enforcement officials established Kids Talk in 2001 to provide a comfortable setting in which to interview children who may be the victims of sexual or physical abuse.

"The coordination of both the Kids Talk program and the medical component of the Child Protection Center is wonderful," said Nancy Diehl, chief of the trial division for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and a longtime advocate of child abuse detection and prevention.

Kids Talk has three locations -- Detroit, Grosse Pointe Park and Southgate -- and conducts about 500 forensic interviews of children a year. There, the interviews with children are digitally recorded on two computer discs -- one goes to a law enforcement agency, the other to the Child Protective Services division of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Palusci, a nationally recognized expert in child abuse, is in the forefront of an effort to develop a board certification process for pediatricians in the subspecialty of child abuse.

In February, the Wayne State University Board of Governors named him the Helppie Endowed Professor of Pediatrics. The endowed professorship from the Helppie Institute for Child Health Advocacy means Palusci now also teaches medical students about diagnosing suspected child maltreatment.

"I don't think there are many full-timers doing this," Palusci said. "There are maybe a dozen part-timers who will admit to saying this is part of their practice." Besides Palusci, the center's staff includes social worker Martha Kerr, registered nurse Deborah Kennedy and medical secretary Cynthia Baker. Each medical evaluation takes about two hours and the team has assessed about 30 children since December.

The Wayne County effort to make interviews with victims more comfortable follows work in Oakland and Macomb counties to establish child advocacy centers where the truth about child abuse is uncovered.

In Pontiac, officials at Care House, the headquarters of the Oakland County Child Abuse and Neglect Council, began recording its forensic interviews with children on April 1, said Patricia Rosen, Care House's executive director. One copy of the interview is made and that is turned over to the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office.

Care House opened in 1989 and Rosen said in 2005 the center conducted 1,145 forensic interviews of children and provided 706 children with more than 1,700 hours of counseling.

In Mt. Clemens, between 250 and 300 forensic interviews of children who may have been abused are done each year at Care House, a facility operated by the Macomb County Child Advocacy Center.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

TO HELP ABUSED KIDS

- Kids Talk, the Wayne County evaluation program for suspected child abuse, can use volunteers and cash donations. Call 313-833-2970 anytime or write Kids Talk at the Guidance Center, 13101 Allen Road, Southgate 48195.

Other nonprofit agencies also can use donations of time or money. To learn more about metro Detroit agencies that provide evaluation and treatment of the victims of child abuse and neglect, go to these Web sites:

www.carehouse.org (Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County)

www.mccarehouse.net (Care House of Macomb County)

Area mom charged as baby's death linked to cocaine

Saturday, April 22, 2006

By ERIC ENGLISH
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

PRESCOTT - Ogemaw County prosecutors say a 5-month-old baby girl died last summer from drinking breast milk contaminated with cocaine.

Today, the mother of the infant is charged with involuntary manslaughter.

"She didn't intend to kill," Assistant Prosecutor Scott M. Williams said. "If I felt it was intentional, I would have charged her with murder."

Prosecutors allege that the mother used cocaine during the time she was breast feeding the child. The drug was then passed on through the mother's breast milk.

The woman, who lives in the Prescott area, was arrested Thursday and released on a personal recognizance bond. She is scheduled for arraignment in Ogemaw County District Court on May 18.

It is the policy of The Times not to disclose names of suspects pending arraignment.

Williams said Friday that the case dates to Aug. 21, 2005, when the woman called 911 in Ogemaw County and reported that her baby wasn't breathing. An ambulance came to the house and took the infant to West Branch Regional Medical Center.

The infant was subsequently pronounced dead, Williams said.

The initial cause of death was believed to be sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS.

The county's medical examiner forwarded some of the infant's blood to a laboratory for routine analysis. Since no foul play was suspected, the samples weren't tested until recently, Williams said.

Williams said he could not say how much cocaine was detected in the infant's blood. But he was told by an expert that any amount of the drug can be fatal to a baby.

"It's our expert's opinion that that was the cause of death. There was cocaine in the baby's system," Williams said.

Williams declined to say if the mother had confessed to using the illegal drug. He added that there were no other arrests or drug-related charges stemming from the case at this time.

Involuntary manslaughter is a felony punishable by a possible 15-year prison sentence.

Williams said the tragedy serves as an important reminder.

"A woman breast feeding has to realize that whatever they are consuming is getting passed on to their baby, and that's exactly what happened here," he said.

- Eric English covers regional news for The Times. He can be reached at 1-800-727-7661 or by e-mail at eenglish@bc-times.com.

SATURDAY,
APRIL 22, 2006

3A

Doug Donnelly, city editor

phone: 240-5777

e-mail: doug@monroenews.com

Baby death investigation continues

Monroe police are continuing an investigation into the death of a 1½-year-old girl who was rushed to the hospital Thursday morning after her father called 911.

A police report said the girl, Gracie Aaron Simmons, had an abrasion on her face when rescuers arrived at her father's house on the 800 block of Hubble St.

"All the detectives are working on it," said Lt. Barclay Stewart of the Monroe Police Department. "We're going to question everyone that had contact with her" in the days before her death.

Lt. Stewart said results of an autopsy performed Friday would not be available for about two weeks.

Probation officer Paul Marks, the first rescuer on the scene Friday morning, attempted to perform CPR on the child but was unable to find any signs of life, he said. Monroe Fire Department officials continued to perform CPR after their arrival at the house.

The girl was pronounced dead at Mercy Memorial Hospital.

OAKLAND COUNTY

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Oakland County

Detroit Free Press

April 24, 2006

PONTIAC: Court orders trial in claim tot was molested at school

The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, a nonprofit agency working to reduce the causes, conditions and effects of poverty, does not enjoy governmental immunity from lawsuits, the Michigan Court of Appeals ruled last week.

Judges Jessica Cooper, Mark Cavanagh and E. Thomas Fitzgerald reinstated a lawsuit filed by a Pontiac woman on behalf of her young daughter against OLHSA, which operates a Head Start program for preschoolers at Frost School in Pontiac.

The mother, whose name is being withheld, claims her daughter, then 4, was molested by a 4-year-old boy in the Head Start program in February 2002.

The boy inappropriately touched the girl while a teacher and a teacher's aide were supposed to be supervising them, the appeals court said.

In August 2002, the firm of attorney Geoffrey Fieger filed a lawsuit in Oakland County Circuit Court against OLHSA and its employees, alleging gross negligence.

The lawsuit, however, was dismissed in April 2005 by visiting Judge Charles Simon on the ground that OLSHA, which holds several government contracts to provide services to poor people, was effectively a part of government and therefore immune from such suits.

But the appeals court said the nonprofit agency was not part of government and did not enjoy governmental immunity. The panel ordered that a trial proceed in Oakland County Circuit Court.

D. Jennifer Andreou, an attorney representing the OLHSA employees, said Friday that she was disappointed the case was ordered to trial.

"We adamantly dispute that there was any molestation," Andreou said.

By Jack Kresnak

OAKLAND COUNTY

Parents to sue over son's fatal fall

Attorney: Southfield landlord at fault April 24, 2006

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The parents of a 16-month-old Southfield boy who tumbled out a window in his family's seventh-floor apartment and fell to his death last week say they will file a lawsuit against the apartment complex.

The parents' lawyer, Arnold Reed of Farmington Hills, said in a written statement Saturday that the blame for the incident lies with the North Park Place Apartment complex, where Saviour God-Scientific Allah fell Thursday.

Southfield police have concluded a preliminary investigation into the incident and ruled it an accident.

No charges are expected to be brought against the boy's parents, Jennifer Holmes, 30, and Andrew Pitts, 26.

Although Reed's statement said a lawsuit would be filed today, it was not immediately clear what the parents might allege. The family has not returned calls seeking comment, and the statement from Reed directed all inquiries to him. Reed could not be reached for comment on Sunday.

Messages left for comment with representatives of the apartment complex also were not returned.

According to Southfield police and witnesses, the boy was playing when his 7-year-old sister noticed a window screen had come loose and went to get her mother.

When she left, Saviour climbed onto the windowsill, police said. His 7-year-old brother pulled him down and then left the room "to go tell on him." When the children returned, Saviour was gone.

On Thursday, Patricia Anderson, vice president of property management for Bluerock Management, said she wasn't aware of any complaints about screens in the building.

Police said last week there has been one other fatal fall at the apartment complex in the last two years.

The 14-floor North Park Place Apartment complex complies with construction codes, according to the Southfield Building Department.

Contact **ZACHARY GORCHOW** at 313-223-4536 or zgorchow@freepress.com.

OAKLAND COUNTY

Boy's death is ruled accident

Fall happened in a flash, cops say

April 22, 2006

BY FRANK WITSIL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The death of a 16-month-old boy who tumbled out of an open window of a Southfield high-rise apartment Thursday morning has been ruled an accident -- and no charges will be brought against the child's parents, police said.

A preliminary investigation showed little could have been done to prevent the death of Saviour God-Scientific Allah -- other than shutting and locking the window or keeping a closer eye on the child, police and city officials said Friday. The 14-floor North Park Place Apartment complex complies with construction codes, according to the Southfield Building Department.

Moreover, Southfield Police Detective David Dowling said, two 7-year-olds -- a boy and a girl -- were in the bedroom watching their younger brother until just moments before 10 a.m., when he fell out the window.

The toddler's parents -- Jennifer Holmes, 30, and Andrew Pitts, 26 -- were in the living room of the seventh-floor, three-bedroom apartment. A third adult was in the kitchen and three other children, a 3-year-old girl and two boys, were in the apartment, he said.

"The only thing I can figure is it happened rapidly," Dowling said, adding that the window has a wide sill and is about 2 feet up from the floor.

Somehow, Dowling said, the window screen came loose and the 7-year-old girl went to get help from an adult to fix it. When she left, Saviour climbed onto the windowsill. The 7-year-old boy got Saviour down, put his younger brother on the bed, and then left the room "to go tell on him."

When the children returned to the room, Dowling said, the toddler was gone.

The Free Press could not reach the child's parents for comment Friday.

Patricia Anderson, the vice president of property management for the Southfield apartment complex, said that all the windows in the 253-unit complex have locks and comply with building codes. She described the death as "a terrible accident" and said she could not comment on what actions the apartment management would do to prevent accidents.

"Our heart goes out to the family," she said.

Wayne Jewell, director of the Southfield Building Department, acknowledged that there have been other similar accidents in the city. A 4-year-old died in 1992 after he plummeted five floors from another high-rise; at the time, the Free Press

reported that he was one of at least seven children to fall from high-rise apartments in the city since the late 1970s.

Contact **FRANK WITSIL** at 248-351-3690 or witsil@freepress.com. Staff writer Gina Damron contributed to this report.

Court May Abolish Required Custody Order

MIRS Capitol Capsule

Friday, April 21, 2006

The state Supreme Court is considering a rule change that would allow police officers or social workers to remove a child from a home without a signed custody order.

Current law requires protective entities to get a signed custody order from a judge before removing a child from the home. This creates a problem when a child is in a situation where they immediately need to be removed from the home.

The change of procedure would require a hearing to be held within 182 days of taking the child out of the home to determine if displacing the child is the child's best interest.

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Mother charged in infant's death

PRESCOTT — The mother of a 5-month-old girl who died after drinking breast milk containing cocaine has been charged with involuntary manslaughter, Ogemaw County prosecutors say.

"She didn't intend to kill," Assistant Prosecutor Scott Williams said. "If I felt it was intentional, I would have charged her with murder."

The woman called 911 on Aug. 21, 2005, to report that her baby wasn't breathing. The cause of death was initially thought to be sudden infant death syndrome. Since no foul play was suspected, the child's blood samples weren't tested until recently, Williams said.

House set for meth vote

Bills deal with kids' exposure to drug, tracking offenders

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The state House is ready to advance its latest attempt to deal with methamphetamine, a drug that has become a growing problem in Michigan and several other states.

The chamber is expected to vote on several bills related to the aftereffects of meth expo-

sure this week. The bills primarily deal with cleanup of sites contaminated by meth production and investigation of cases where children have been exposed to drug labs.

Other bills deal with tracking the number and location of meth offenses to get a better handle on the problem in Michigan. Similar bills have been passed by the state Senate or await action in that chamber.

At least 250 meth labs were busted in Michigan last year, up from 209 in 2004. Just three labs were seized in 1997.

The highly addictive drug can

Read the fine print

► The meth bills are House Bills 5797-5798, 5822, 5841-5846 and 5930.

On the Web

► www.legislature.mi.gov

be made with common household products, including cold medicine.

The Legislature already has taken steps to crack down on the drug. In December, a law took effect making it harder to buy Sudafed, Claritin-D and other over-the-counter cold tablets containing ephedrine or pseudoephed-

rine — the key ingredient used to “cook” meth.

Also next week, lawmakers will continue to work on budgets for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

A House subcommittee will continue to hear testimony from university presidents on budget deals. Plans offered by Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the state Senate would give the state's three big research universities — the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University — a 2-percent increase. Funding increases would vary for the state's 12 other public universities.

AMBER Alert

The U.S. Postal Service continues its tradition of drawing attention to important social causes by issuing the AMBER Alert stamp in 2006 to honor a program dedicated to the rapid recovery of abducted children. AMBER stands for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response.

Law enforcement officials will issue an AMBER Alert when they have sufficient information regarding the circumstances of an abduction and believe that the kidnapped child is in imminent danger of serious injury or death. A description of the victim and the circumstances is then sent to area radio and television stations via the Emergency Alert System and is immediately broadcast to the general public.

The AMBER Alert program originated in the Dallas-Fort Worth, TX, area in 1996 after the tragic kidnapping and murder of nine-year-old Amber Hagerman, for whom the program is named. Other states and communities soon began adopting similar plans, and by 2005 a national alert system coordinated by the U.S. Department of Justice extended across all 50 states.

AMBER alerts, which have helped in the recovery of nearly 200 children, can mobilize the community during the first critical hours following a kidnapping and provide the police with a wide network of eyes and ears to assist in the search.

Organizations that support the AMBER Alert program include the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Polly Klaas Foundation. The chalk pastel illustration by artist Vivienne Flesher shows a reunited mother and child entwined in each other's arms. The type on each stamp and text across the header of the stamp pane reads "AMBER ALERT saves missing children."



Saturday, April 22, 2006

Michigan's anti-violent video game law shoots blanks

The Detroit News

Since the state's ban on the sale of violent video games to minors was overturned earlier this month, it's time for Gov. Jennifer Granholm and like-minded legislators to concentrate on more important issues.

The video game sales ban was a bad idea to begin with, and state resources have been wasted proposing and defending it. A federal district court judge ruled the law unconstitutional, which was expected before it was passed and signed. Similar laws in other states already had met the same fate.

The video game industry, like the motion picture industry, rates its products to help parents determine what's suitable for children. That's the appropriate protection, not misguided government intervention.

Monday, April 24, 2006

Background checks still fail kids Budget-minded sports organizations use Mich. program that lacks complete criminal data.

Fred Girard / The Detroit News

April 24, 2006

If the Michigan State Youth Soccer Association received a coaching application today from Mark Christensen and ran a criminal background check on him through its normal channels, he no doubt would be found qualified to mentor kids.

A misdemeanor assault conviction from 1978 would show up, as well as a 1981 conviction for failing to pay alimony or child support, neither serious enough to exclude him from becoming one of the association's 12,000-plus coaches, who oversee 88,000 youngsters.

But there would be no mention of another Christensen conviction from the 1980s, for assaulting a motorist in a road-rage incident; or his 1999 aggravated assault conviction in Georgia, for which he was sentenced to 20 years but served less than four months.

Michigan soccer officials would never know of those incidents because they continue to conduct background checks on the Michigan State Police Internet Criminal History Access Tool -- even though a Detroit News investigation two years ago revealed gaping holes and systemic flaws in that database.

I-CHAT's one virtue is that it's free to nonprofits such as youth leagues -- but it's far from perfect.

As I-CHAT puts it on its own disclaimer: "Some individuals will appear to have a criminal record when they do not. Other individuals will appear not to have a record when they do."

"This whole field is a mess, and that's critical because it puts kids in harm's way," said Dan Varner, head of Think Detroit PAL, a private nonprofit group that offers athletic programs for kids.

After The News' 2004 articles, PAL changed its method for checking the backgrounds of the 1,400 coaches who run teams for 13,000 Detroit boys and girls.

PAL began using one of several online companies that perform nationwide criminal checks. Primarily because it is a member of the Florida-based National Council of Youth Sports, PAL gets a bulk rate cost of \$4.25 per coach.

The state soccer association, however, has conducted 15,084 background checks on I-CHAT since The News' articles, and found 561 criminal records.

The Michigan Amateur Hockey Association said publicly it would stop using I-CHAT after The News' articles, but since then has run 19,784 background checks there, finding 1,364 criminal records.

When amateur organizations do find a conviction on a background check, another problem develops -- what to do about it.

"A check would be performed, and then a volunteer, many, many times not trained, would receive the information back," said Sally S. Cunningham, national executive director of the National Council of Youth Sports.

"So now Joe gets a hit on John, and he says, 'Oh my gosh, I've known John for like 20 years, I can't believe this.' So he picks up the phone and he calls Chuck, and Chuck or Chuck's wife answers the phone, and before you know it, we've got this mess going on.

"In fact, someone at the courthouse may have transposed numbers; he may have had a common name and it wasn't John at all. But the volunteer, the untrained individual, has this piece of information, they've told others, they've actually subjected themselves and their organization to probably further liability."

After consultations with the insurance industry, the council and private interests founded the National Center for Safety Initiatives, which established common standards called "red light, green light" to determine which offenses should exclude people from coaching, and what to do when such convictions are found.

"All the information (on convictions) is confidentially stored at the center," Cunningham said.

Trish McGonnell, director of the center, said names are checked again during the year; and a name that pops up on a sex-offender registry anywhere in the country is red-flagged immediately.

The cost is \$25 per coach per year, which many youth leagues would find prohibitive.

"There's a movement to ask coaches themselves to be responsible for the cost," McGonnell said. "Another possibility is league sponsors."

"The bottom-line goal is we want to see children are safe all the time," Cunningham said, "and in particular, when parents are trusting them to us, that we are certain that we have done our very, very best to ensure that the children are safe, and that they can really have a fun time on our fields."

Sunday, April 23, 2006

Massachusetts health plan is a poor model

It's sad that Massachusetts, a state which has worked hard to assure health care for all, has turned its back on the well-documented best solution, a single payer plan funded by tax dollars, and instead proposes to provide "near" universal access by requiring all of the uninsured to purchase private health insurance. Lower income families would be subsidized by the state, but any family with an annual income greater than \$30,000 would have to buy its own insurance or pay a fine.

In order for this legislation to work, truly comprehensive yet affordable health insurance plans would need to be available - and that is an impossibility. Even more troublesome, however, is the fact that this law will do nothing to control the escalating cost of health care.

Large overhead expenses (15 cents out of every premium dollar) for private insurance will persist and those who profit grandly in the current system will continue to do so. Administrative costs for single payer plans such as U.S. Medicare and Canadian Medicare are less than 5 cents on the dollar. Is this new Massachusetts plan really the model we want to replicate in other states?

Dr. Andrew J. Zweifler, Ann Arbor

Feds offer seniors Medicare D help

Detroit News

April 23, 2006

Senior citizens interested in signing up for the Medicare D Prescription Program can get assistance on May 2. Officials with the Social Security Administration and Medicare Matters will be on-hand from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at St. Kieran's in Shelby Township to provide guidance on applying for the program. Health screenings will also be available on-site, at 53600 Mound. Contact Macomb County Senior Citizen Services at (586) 469-6307.

Michigan Report

April 21, 2006

WELFARE CASELOADS DOWN, FOOD ASSISTANCE UP AGAIN

The number of families receiving cash assistance from the state decreased for the second month in March, while the number of families who received Food Assistance Program aid rose for the sixth consecutive month, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 78,238 cases in March, down from 78,889 cases in February. The caseloads represented 211,235 people in March down from 213,313 persons in February.

In March there were 512,000 families receiving Food Assistance Program benefits, compared to February there were 508,552. That compares with 506,506 families in January, 502,981 in December, 498,935 households in November and 497,814 in October.

Childcare cases reversed a decline that began after the holidays. The total caseload for that program in March was 64,685, compared to 61,890 in February and moving closer to the 64,720 cases in December. The March caseload represented 121,793 children.

Earned income cases rose to 34 percent from the 33 percent of those required to find work reporting income recorded the prior three months. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit has also held steady at about 13 percent since October.

Ready to stamp out hunger

Niles Daily Star

Monday, April 24, 2006 11:23 AM EDT

NILES - The chance to clear out the cupboards for a good cause has arrived.

The National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC Branch 775), along with the U.S. Postal Service, the National Rural Letter Carriers Association, the AFL-CIO, the United Way of America and America's Second Harvest will hold the 14th Annual Letter Carrier's Food Drive on Saturday, May 13.

Residents are asked to please leave non-perishable food, soap and paper goods by their mailbox.

Letter carriers and volunteers in Niles, Berrien Springs, Buchanan, Three Oaks, New Buffalo, Dowagiac and Galien will then deliver it to a local food bank.

The nation's largest one-day food drive is traditionally held on the Saturday before Mother's Day.

The 2005 campaign collected 42,745 pounds of food locally and more than 71 million pounds nationwide.

For further information, call 683-5520.

MORNING SUN

Visits to Red Cross food, baby pantries increase

By JEREMY H. DICKMAN
Sun Community Editor

Rising unemployment rates and higher gasoline prices are just two of the reasons for an increase in use of the Central Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross' food and baby pantries.

During the current fiscal year (which runs from July 1, 2005, to June 30 of this year), the Red Cross has seen a 13 percent increase in families using the local pantries.

"A lot of it fluctuates with the economy itself," said Irene Little, emergency program director.

Serving an average of 130 to 150 families per month, Little said 201 families were served in August 2005, while February of this year had 88.

"That was the first time I had seen it under 100 for a month in two years," Little said. "I also never thought I would see over 200 in one month, but as unemployment rates go up, our numbers also go up."

Open from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, both the food and baby pantries provide Isabella County residents with three days worth of food in an emergency situation.

A separate entity from the Food Pantry for about two years, the Baby Pantry was started by Red Cross board member Ann Brockman and her family to honor a loved one.

"A lot of people don't realize we have the Baby Pantry until they see it," Little said.

To use the pantries residents must receive a referral from any area agency, such as The Salvation Army, Listening Ear Crisis Center, or EightCap. Department of Human Services recipients, including those getting food stamps, Medicaid, or cash assistance must get their referrals from a DHS office. Baby Pantry referrals are available on-site.

Assistance from the pantries is available four times each per year and people also receive \$15 in a dispersing order each time for purchasing dairy products at Ric's Food Center, Save-A-Lot, or Witbeck's Family Foods for those near Clare County, Little said.

"Without restrictions we would never ever be able to keep enough food,"

Little said.

A majority of the items at both pantries is donated by community members or local businesses. What isn't contributed is purchased through grants from various agencies, such as the United Way of Isabella County.

"I'm very grateful to the community and agencies for their support throughout the year," Little said.

Food or monetary donations can be sent to the Central Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross, 215 E. Broadway St. in Mt. Pleasant, and earmarked for a specific area.

"Every little bit helps," Little said. "I will not turn anything away in food products."

Items of need for the Food Pantry include soups, canned meats, macaroni and cheese, canned fruits, pork and beans, and cereal. Baby Pantry items needed are diapers, infant formula, shampoo, and other hygiene products. Donations are accepted from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

Since July 2005 the Food Pantry has helped 1,172 Isabella County families or 3,391 people by providing 30,519 meals, said Morgan Curtis, special events intern.

For more information call the Red Cross at 773-3615 or (989) 539-0200 or online at centralmichigan.redcross.org. Clare County residents in need of assistance can call Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency at (989) 386-3805 or after hours by calling Listening Ear at 772-2918.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/042206/loc_panttries001.shtml

Empty Bowls, full hearts

Annual benefit raises money for SOS programs for homeless

Monday, April 24, 2006

BY JAMES BRIGGS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

he bowls might not be suitable for holding food. But eventually, they will fill a plate with food for someone who needs it.

Students Offering Support hosted this year's Empty Bowls program Wednesday at the Sidetrack Bar and Grill in Depot Town. Empty Bowls is a national program, run locally by the Concordia University art department. College and grade-school students create bowls through the Concordia art department, and the artistic bowls are sold with soup. The proceeds benefit SOS, which provides food and shelter for the homeless and those who are in danger of becoming homeless.

Children as young as 4 and all the way up to adult college students crafted the bowls, which are still for sale at the college.

"This is a giving thing. We don't stress the utility of the bowls," said Becky Steinkellner, a professor of art, drawing, painting and printing for Concordia. "As you can see, some have holes in them."

This year students created about 140 bowls, which are expected to raise \$1,000 for SOS. That money will go straight to the food pantry to feed people who are on the verge of homelessness. To buy bowls, or to become a participating group in the Empty Bowls program, contact Steinkellner at 734-995-7358, or steinb@cuaa.edu.

Creating the bowls is a learning experience for students not only because of the art lessons involved, but because of the community service they are performing, Steinkellner said.

"Most kids don't know that there are kids just like them who go hungry," she said.

Nikki Dawson, 13, created a bowl with her class from St. Matthew Lutheran in Walled Lake. The process took about 1 1/2 hours, she said.

"We started with a big slab of clay and did it step by step," she said.

When students are done, the bowls are stamped with the Empty Bowls symbol - not with their signatures. That's because "we didn't do it to glorify us," said Julie Huinh, 13, of Walled Lake.

Selecting bowls to bring home always is a thrill for Pete and Connie Slazinski, a retired couple from Canton who attended Michigan's first Empty Bowls event 12 years ago at Lahser High School in Bloomfield Hills.

"There's quite a philosophy behind it, really," Connie said. "It really isn't the bowl; it's how you're helping needy people. I just think that's a phenomenal idea."

It's also nice to add some artistic bowls to their home collection, they said.

"We just can't decide (which ones to buy)," Pete said as he looked at three bowls on a table while trying to pick out two. "We might just spend another \$10."

The Empty Bowls fundraiser has become necessary for the food pantry operations of SOS, which cannot use its main source of funding - the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development provides 65 percent of SOS's budget - to help anyone who is not homeless. Fundraisers like Empty Bowls allow SOS to broaden its range of services, SOS public relations director Nancy Shore said.

"It's done by everyone from students to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who want to find ways to combat homelessness in the community," Shore said. "People really need to understand this is a local issue. We distributed 30,000 meals (in 2005). We're a lifeline for homeless families and children."

James Briggs can be reached at 810-844-2003.

Ground work starts for Blitz

Saturday, April 22, 2006

SCOTT DAVIS
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Saginaw Habitat for Humanity volunteers are breaking ground this morning on their latest effort to put roofs over the heads of low-income families.

The groundbreaking was set for 9 a.m. on Atwater near Cornelia -- the site of one of five houses that volunteers will build as part of the 10th annual Blitz Build, set for Friday through Wednesday, June 9-24.

"It makes a huge difference in the lives of those families," said Cameron M. Brady, Habitat for Humanity's development manager. "None of these families ever owned a home. Some of these folks are the first house owners in the history of their family."

The public is invited to a free pancake breakfast that follows at Longfellow Elementary School, 1314 Brown.

As part of the annual effort, Habitat also will build homes at 1220 S. Warren, 1517 Barnard, 1003 S. Webster and 841 S. 15th.

In the next few weeks, Brady said volunteers will pour foundations for the five sites. In mid-June, more than 1,000 volunteers will build the homes.

The Michigan State Housing Authority is providing a \$10,000 down payment to each family, community donations pay part of the cost, and Habitat is offering a no-interest loan to the families to finance the remainder.

Brady estimated each family's monthly mortgage at \$350.

Lansing State Journal Editorial

April 22, 2006

These jobs were made for Michigan

A call to a state customer service help line will eventually get you an actual human being to talk to. But, that person works in India.

That's galling to folks in Michigan, which has a stubbornly high unemployment rate.

There's good news on this job outsourcing front, however. As the LSJ's John Schneider reported this week, on May 20 the Department of Human Resources' call-center contract will transfer to an Oscoda-based company.

The jobs were originally outsourced in 1999 during John Engler's administration.

Overseas jobs flow back to Michigan: That's a tune we'd like to hear over and over.

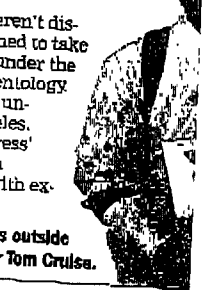
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THE GAZET

NEWSROOM 801

Programs can help low-income kids get The Promise

By John Dillworth

I read with interest your March 30 editorial, "Do the math on loss of The Promise."

Viewpoint

You hit the nail on the head that, for low-income families, a strategy must be developed to keep their kids in the Kalamazoo Public Schools through graduation. KPS does aggressively partner with area nonprofits and agencies. The Department of Human Services, Michigan Works, Goodwill Housing Resources Inc. all partner with KPS on programs that work for the families we all serve.

At Goodwill, our statistics show we served more than 1,600 single parents with 4,000-plus kids under the age of 18 living in the Kalamazoo school system in the past year. Forty percent of those folks live in the Edison neighborhood, our new head-quarters location by this fall.

We have a program called "Making It Work" with HRU, funded by DHS, the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and Michigan Works and the latest statistics show 90 percent of families in the program are still employed and housed in the same location after a year. That means household stability, greatly enhancing the children's chances of school success. With a basic state employment program that expects us to change the life of a person in 90 days, where a 40 percent employment success rate is normal, it's obvious that creating a safety net for the at-risk household works.

DHS has a social worker at Spring Valley who helps bring household stability by making its services easily accessible. All of us would love to see both of these programs and other successful efforts under way, such as Workers on Wheels, expand, but it's all about money. Landlords want to get paid. Many will reduce the rent, but they have expenses, too.

Maintaining a car for a second-shift job runs more than \$2,000 per year on average. Keeping a single parent on the job, in the same location, with child care when they're working second and third shifts when the buses don't run, is a community challenge of immense proportions.

We do have solutions that have proven themselves. Federal

and state funds are static at best, and generally diminishing. Kalamazoo is a great community and local efforts have tried to fill the funding gap. But I'm sorry to say, it's just to maintain the status quo overall, and we all know that isn't enough.

There is a program languishing in Lansing in the Department of Human Services called JET. One reality is not everyone receiving DHS services is "ready to work." JET's plan was to work with those who truly are ready to work and provide a support structure around the person, including housing, child care, transportation, and other assistance so the person can succeed on the job. Employment stability creates home stability and a positive opportunity for learning among the children in that environment. It's really not rocket science as the name JET might imply. But, it does require a change in how DHS does things.

Several of our staff helped develop the project and it recently disappeared from discussions with DHS. We can only surmise that funding became an issue. Perhaps our legislators can find the money for a test in Kalamazoo County? I think if they did, we would be successful in obtaining matching funds from local funding sources. I say that because school is one leg on the stool. the parent's interest in their child's education is another and a stable home environment is another. A stable home environment is created by a stable work environment. They all work together and that's easy for anyone to see.

While we're at it, let's get the funding to place a DHS case-worker at every Kalamazoo public school and every other elementary school in the county with a significant low-income population. This eases the effort to obtain services and encourages parents to come into the schools. It's all part of the circle of support, necessary for every child to succeed. Middle-income and upper-income families have it. We have to help low-income families to get it so their children can break the cycle of poverty and use the benefits of The Kalamazoo Promise.

John Dillworth is the president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan.

Many students eligible for Kalamazoo Promise

Sex, drug allegations to play out in Unger murder trial

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

April 23, 2006

A case that has riveted Metro Detroit with allegations of adultery, drinking and drug use is expected to play out in a northern Michigan courtroom beginning this week when prosecutors attempt to prove that Mark Unger killed his wife on a family trip.

Both sides agree that the prosecution's case is built on circumstantial evidence.

"There are no eyewitnesses, no fingerprints, no bloodstains," said defense attorney Robert S. Harrison, who has worked dozens of high-profile cases in his 38-year career, both as a defense attorney and as an assistant prosecutor. "No microscopic fibers or DNA. And there is certainly no confession or statement to link my client with her death. Nothing."

Unger, 45, of Huntington Woods is charged with first-degree murder in the death of his wife Florence, 37, in October 2003 during a family getaway to Lower Herring Lake near Frankfort in northern Michigan.

Prosecutors say Mark Unger deliberately caused his wife to fall 12 feet from a deck to a concrete pad, then dragged her, severely injured and unconscious, into the lake where she drowned.

To prove their case to a Benzie County jury in Beulah later this week they'll trot out dozens of witnesses to paint a picture of discontent: a contentious divorce and the couple's arguments over child custody; Florence Unger's fear of her husband and her concerns about the fateful weekend trip; Mark Unger's drug and alcohol problems; and Florence Unger's secret, two-year affair with Guy Stark, a friend of both.

After numerous legal stops and starts, the trial will begin with jury selection Wednesday in Benzie County, a lightly populated up north haven better known for lakeside cottages and shimmering water than for high-profile murder cases.

The trial is expected to take up to three weeks and draw national attention. Defense lawyer Harrison has been contacted by several Detroit area media, Court TV, the major TV networks and several nationally broadcast programs, including "Dateline," "Prime Time" and "48 Hours."

The Ungers had gone north with their two young sons for a final fall getaway and to attempt to resolve matters in their pending divorce.

The morning of Oct. 28, she was found floating near the boathouse of Watervale Inn. She had suffered a massive head injury and broken pelvis from a 12-foot fall off a deck onto a concrete pad below.

Assistant Attorney General Donna Pendergast has listed 59 witnesses she may call to testify in her effort to convince jurors that Mark Unger planned and carried out his wife's murder. They may range from forensic experts to friends of Florence Unger.

Harrison has indicated he may call as many as 42 witnesses on his client's behalf, including Unger's sons, now 9 and 12 years old. Harrison says the lack of physical evidence in the case puts an extraordinary burden of proof on the prosecution.

Unger told police the couple stood out on the boathouse deck that night in 2003, and at some point he left to check on their sons in a nearby cottage. His wife remained there alone, but when Unger returned to the boathouse, she was gone.

When she didn't return to the cottage he assumed she was visiting others at the resort and he went to sleep. The next morning, finding she still hadn't returned, he reported her disappearance to a worker and noted she had seemed "depressed" the night before.

Her body was found floating near the boathouse a few minutes later.

Harrison said he will produce expert witnesses who will detail the deteriorating condition of the railing on the boathouse deck and how it could have easily given way from Florence Unger's weight, causing her to fall. A physics expert will explain how after the fall her body could have ended up in the lake several feet away "without the intervention of my client or anyone else."

He will also rebut the idea that Mark Unger knew of his wife's affair.

"There has been much made about the affair," said Harrison. "My client didn't even know about it until I made him look at some e-mail love letters between his wife and Stark. He had even invited (Stark) to join them up north that weekend.

"He was so upset he threw up right in my office," said Harrison. "Now, if he's able to force himself to become physically sick like that, he's a damned good actor."

With circumstantial evidence, prosecutors try to piece together seemingly unrelated facts to support a theory or conclusion as to how and why something did or did not occur. It can be used to establish innocence as well as guilt in criminal trials. It can be used to demonstrate a person's behavior or even craft a motive. Theoretically, the more circumstantial evidence is presented, the stronger the case.

Pendergast, who has successfully prosecuted dozens of murder cases for Oakland and Wayne counties, declined to be interviewed for this article. But others, including Gregory Townsend, an assistant Oakland County prosecuting attorney who worked alongside Pendergast for years, believe Pendergast has a "great case to prosecute."

"I love circumstantial evidence," said Townsend, a 27-year veteran of more than 100 murder trials and 50 arson cases, one of the most difficult crimes to prove. "I prefer circumstantial cases. Circumstantial evidence can't be cross-examined. It is what it is.

"Fingerprints, DNA, bite marks, fibers, even being caught with a smoking gun -- it's all circumstantial evidence."

Townsend recalls another case to illustrate his point: In March 2002, a Wayne Circuit Court jury found former Redford Township resident Mark Stephan guilty of first-degree murder in the November 1982 death of his 25-year-old wife, Mary. The case has several similarities to the Unger case.

Mark Stephan told police he found his wife fully clothed in the bathtub with the shower still running. Initially ruled an accidental drowning, the woman's mother pestered police for years to investigate further.

Nineteen years later, Redford Township Police Sgt. Adam Pasciak reopened the case in October 2001. Stephan, who had since remarried and moved to Virginia, was extradited to Michigan to stand trial.

Police and the Prosecutor's Office put together a circumstantial case based on how the Stephens, who had been married for only two years, had quarreled after Mary Stephan had discovered her husband had lied to her about his nonexistent job.

On the morning of her death, the couple was supposed to meet with the Internal Revenue Service about a tax return.

A jury found the evidence convincing and convicted Stephan, now serving a natural life sentence in prison. The conviction has also held up under appeal.

The person who convicted Stephan? An assistant prosecuting attorney named Donna Pendergast.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

Former county leader dies

Saturday, April 22, 2006

THE SAGINAW NEWS

A former Saginaw County Child Development Centers Inc. leader died last month in Topeka, Kan.

Charles W. Batsell died March 13 in a Topeka nursing home. He was 84.

Batsell, a Paris, Mo. native, also was a case worker for Saginaw County's **Department of Social Services** in the 1970s.

Former colleagues said Batsell served as president of the board of directors for Saginaw County Child Development for a few years in the early 1970s.

Batsell also was a member of the United States Conservation Corps and the United States Army. He also taught in three different states and then pursued a career in social work. He was involved in several civic and community organizations in Kansas and Michigan. Batsell moved his family to Topeka following his retirement.

Surviving Batsell is his wife of 55 years, Gloraine Batsell and their three daughters -- Charla Weiss, Piedmont, Calif., Alistair Young, Colleyville, Texas and Tamara Barnes, Dallas -- and three grandchildren.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Child Support payments in Genesee County going electronic

April 24, 2006

Flint – The Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support in coordination with the Genesee County Friend of the Court will begin disbursing some child support payments through a debit card beginning April 26, in accordance with state law. This new law requires all child support payments to be electronically disbursed via direct deposit into a personal checking/savings account or to a debit card, unless recipients meet hardship exception criteria.

Customers who currently receive paper checks in Genesee County have received information in the mail, and were given the choice of direct deposit to their checking/savings account or to the debit card. Paper child support checks will no longer be sent out to customers unless they meet the hardships exceptions described in the law.

Before implementation of the law about 52 percent of child support recipients in Genesee County had their payments directly deposited into their personal checking or savings account. Customers currently participating in direct deposit are not required to switch to the debit card.

The new VISA debit cards, which will be issued at no cost to customers, can be used like any other bank or credit union debit card at millions of locations that accept VISA debit cards - without incurring any fees. Customers can also get cash back with purchases from any of over 29,000 Interlink merchants in Michigan – again without fees. Customers choosing to access debit card funds using an automated teller machine (ATM) will be subject to ATM fees.

In states with electronic disbursement already in place, about two-thirds choose direct deposit to checking/savings and one-third choose direct deposit to debit cards.

Attached to this press advisory is an overview of electronic disbursement and a statewide implementation schedule.

For more information on electronic disbursement of child support go to the child support section of the DHS Web site, www.michigan.gov/dhs or to www.misdu.com.



Michigan Department of Human Services
Office of Child Support

**Electronic Disbursement of Child Support
Statewide Implementation Schedule**

MONTH*	COUNTY
2005 November	Pilot Counties: Muskegon, Shiawassee, Marquette
2006 January	Oakland
February	Huron, Lapeer, Livingston, St. Clair, Sanilac, Tuscola
March	Macomb
April	Genesee
May	Alcona, Alger, Alpena, Antrim, Arenac, Baraga, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Crawford, Delta, Dickinson, Emmet, Gogebic, Grand Traverse, Houghton, Iosco, Iron, Kalkaska, Keweenaw, Leelanau, Luce, Mackinac, Menominee, Montmorency, Ontonagon, Oscoda, Otsego, Ottawa, Presque Isle, Schoolcraft
June	Kent
July	Berrien, Branch, Cass, Hillsdale, Lenawee, St. Joseph, Van Buren
August	Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Midland, Missaukee, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana, Ogemaw, Osceola, Roscommon, Wexford
September	Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Washtenaw
October	Allegan, Gratiot, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Saginaw
November	Barry, Calhoun, Jackson, Monroe
December	Wayne

*This is the month in which the first of the three notices is sent to clients asking them to return the request for direct deposit or a debit card will be sent. Within two weeks after the first notice, a second notice is sent to those who have not chosen direct deposit to request again that they choose direct deposit or receive a debit card. Approximately two weeks after the second notice, a third notice is sent to those who have not chosen direct deposit to let them know they will receive a debit card. They receive a debit card approximately one week after the third notice.



Michigan Department of Human Services Office of Child Support

ELECTRONIC DISBURSEMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT

- Public Act 548 of 2004 (MCL 400.236(4)) requires that the Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU) disburse support electronically, either through direct deposit to an individual's checking/savings account or to a debit card.
- One-third of Michigan's child support customers already have direct deposit. All customers will be offered a choice of either direct deposit to checking/savings or debit card. (In other states with electronic disbursement, statistics show that approximately two-thirds chose direct deposit and one-third received a debit card.)
- The debit card option will be phased into electronic disbursement during 2006. See the statewide implementation schedule.
- Electronic disbursement:
 - Provides immediate access to funds.
 - Eliminates mail delays and lost or stolen checks.
 - Eliminates check-cashing fees.
 - Eliminates returned mail and delays when customer has not updated his/her address.
 - Reduces money held by the state waiting for a customer to update his/her address.
 - Makes more efficient use of taxpayer dollars (better service, lower cost).
- Exemptions to electronic disbursement may be requested and granted for:
 - Individuals with a mental or physical disability that imposes a hardship.
 - Individuals with a language or literacy barrier that imposes a hardship.
 - Individuals with payments that are not recurring (two or less per year), or are not expected to continue in a 12-month period.
 - Individuals with both home and work addresses that are more than 30 miles from an ATM or their financial institution.
- When a customer chooses the debit card, the MiSDU deposits support payments directly to the card. The card can be used just like any Visa-branded card. (Only the MiSDU can deposit money into this account; the cardholder cannot add funds.)
- There is no fee to use the card at the millions of locations that accept Visa debit card for point-of-sale transactions (grocery stores, retailers, gas stations, etc.).
- Customers can also get cash back with purchase from Interlink merchants without any fee. There are over 29,000 Interlink merchants in Michigan.
- Each cardholder can also receive cash back free of charge from any bank or credit union that process Visa cash advances at the teller window.
- Customers who choose to use an ATM to access their debit card funds will pay ATM fees. Today, customers without checking/savings accounts have few alternatives to paying check-cashing fees.
- For additional information on electronic disbursement go to the child support section of the DHS Web site www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.misdu.com